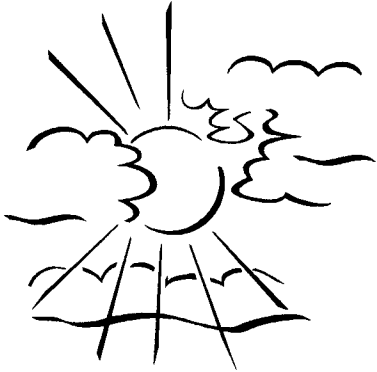


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# **Articles in Today's Clips**

## **Tuesday, November 1, 2005**

(Be sure to maximize your screen to read your clips)

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November 1, 2005

## Unemployment rate drops to lowest point of the year

By Matt Whetstone, Cadillac News

The change is minimal but, for area counties, it still represents the lowest unemployment rate of the year.

"The way we look at it, it remained somewhat unchanged comparative to monthly figures," said Jim Astalos, economic analyst for the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth.

September is not usually a big indicator of the greater employment and unemployment pictures in the state because of seasonal change. Those who left the workforce to return to school were offset by those returning to the workforce after a summer vacation, Astalos said. The opposite effect occurs in May and June, leaving most of the summer months close together.

Still, local counties saw a drop in the unemployment rate. Missaukee reached its lowest rate of the year after dropping 0.1 percent from August to 5.2 percent.

Over the course of 2005, Osceola County has benefited from a considerable drop. In January, unemployment stood at 9.9 percent. In July, it was still high at 7.7 percent. However, August showed a 1.6 percent drop to 6.1 percent and the trend continued in September with another 0.3 percent decrease to 5.8 percent.

Wexford County's rate, meanwhile, has declined 3.1 percent from a 9.2 percent high in January and February. The rate has been up and down throughout the year, but August and September have both dropped. The September rate was 6.1 percent.

Lake County has also dropped considerably during 2005 but the rate still ranks above other area counties at 7.5 percent. Since January, however, that number has declined 5.4 percent.

The numbers do not reflect the closure of the Michigan Youth Correctional Facility in Baldwin, which was closed in October.

Statewide, the unadjusted unemployment rate has dropped 2 percent from 7.9 percent in January to 5.9 percent in September.

The state's seasonally adjusted rate stood at 6.4 percent in September after a 0.3 percent decrease as total employment rose 36,000 and unemployment fell by 17,000, expanding the labor force. Over the last year, the state jobless rate is down 0.7 percent.

"The state's jobless rate fell by six-tenths of a percentage point in the last two months," said Rick Waclawek, director of the DLEG's Bureau of Labor Market Information and Strategic Initiatives. "However, we will need several more months of data to determine if this is a short-term occurrence or a longer-term trend, especially given some of the challenges taking place in the automotive sector."

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# Wrong jobs strategy

## House GOP economic plan won't work for Michigan

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Monday, October 31, 2005

While California has begun handing out some of the \$3 billion in bond money its voters approved last year for stem cell research - which is bound to advance the Golden State's already modern economy - Michigan House Republicans last week suggested slashing a promising state plan for creating cutting-edge jobs.

Memo to the GOP leadership: You can't carry Michigan forward by walking backward.

Of course, that's not how House Speaker Craig DeRoche is selling this latest twist in the business taxes/jobs growth debate Lansing has been mired in most of the year. He sees this new idea as a useful compromise, which would give the House GOP, Senate Republicans and Democratic Gov. Jennifer Granholm all something of what they want.

However, DeRoche and his colleagues are wrong. They should be sticking with their previous proposal, which all sides had accepted, to invest \$1 billion from a 1999 legal settlement with tobacco companies on research and other business strategies that could grow 21st century employment.

While this spending is not guaranteed to bear fruit, several states are going this route to create jobs that pay well. At the very least, such pools of cash spent at universities and other research institutions and on technology development draws the best and brightest people to a region. And without that talent in a knowledge economy, little of consequence will happen.

This state's scientists and engineers cannot be impressed with the new House GOP proposal to cut that \$1 billion for research and innovation to \$300 million. The balance would go for tax cuts to aid beleaguered manufacturers and others.

While manufacturers need a hand, this is not the way to do it, primarily because the tobacco money eventually will run out. When that happens, it would leave the state deciding whether to continue the tax cuts or reduce spending on such items as higher education and health care - areas already underfunded because of the state's economic woes and tax cuts during the Gov. John Engler years.

Realistically, every Michigan business doesn't need or deserve a tax cut to foster economic growth. That's especially true if it would reduce revenues for universities and other vital services. Indeed, those quality of life factors are the No. 1 determinant in where the truly wealth-producing companies choose to locate. Places like California understand this, and its stem cell program, which is starting to attract and train researchers, adds to the state's allure.

Next to that competition, the House GOP economic plan is laughable, a puny construction that won't provide a solid foundation for Michigan's future. Speaker DeRoche and company have already demonstrated they can build something better.

# Back to the jobs bill

The Grand Rapids Press

Sunday, October 30, 2005

If State House Republicans are intent on burying a promising employment-creation idea, they are doing a good job of it. Four months after first proposing use of the state's tobacco settlement fund to grow the state economy, this week finds the House blocking implementation of the concept.

The House's primary goal evidently isn't job creation but business tax reduction. The two aren't necessarily the same. Nor should reducing business taxes be foremost in the state's economic recovery strategy. A better hope, one that deserves to be handled separately and immediately, is the one now awaiting action in the House.

That idea, called securitization, would sell to investors about \$1 billion worth of the \$6.2 billion in payments the state still has coming from the 1996 multi-state lawsuit against major cigarette companies. The \$1 billion then would be used in loans and grants to advance new businesses: generally in the fields of technology, life sciences, alternative energy, defense and others that could produce a new generation of jobs.

The House passed this legislation by a lopsided vote a month ago. Gov. Jennifer Granholm has said she would sign it. The Senate went along by a near unanimous vote two weeks ago and returned it to the House for minor adjustments.

But now House Speaker Craig DeRoche, R-Novi, wants to go back to an earlier approach that the Senate and gov-

ernor have rightly rejected: spending most of the money on tax cuts. Mr. DeRoche would put \$700 million into the cuts -- reductions in the personal property tax and Single Business Tax that are paid largely by manufacturers -- leaving the rest, \$300 million, for economic development. This is backwards. Michigan's business taxes have been reduced in recent years. The SBT is due to disappear in 2009. At this point, investing in new forms of economic development should be the higher priority.

Two Grand Rapids-area Republicans should lean on Mr. DeRoche to change course: Reps. Jerry Kooiman of Grand Rapids and William Huizenga of Zeeland. Mr. Kooiman is a Republican leader; Mr. Huizenga was a designer of the securitization/economic development plan that passed the House in September.

The House this week should act on the securitization bill it received back from the Senate and without any requirement for an accompanying tax cut. Make this a clean bill. One of the prime arguments for securitization over Ms. Granholm's original economic development plan, via a bond sale, is that it could be achieved quickly. The House on its own has erased much of that advantage. Time now to use what's left of it.

# House, senate reps need to think for themselves

Gladwin County Record

November 1, 2005

Is Michigan's economy suffering? It appears so according to statistics from other parts of the nation. And we have the highest unemployment rate in the nation, more than seven percent.

So how do our state legislators deal with the issue? They borrow money. Or, better yet, sell off about \$1 billion owed the state from the tobacco settlement for a mere .59 on the dollar. Then use \$700 million of that money to subsidize a tax cut.

The other \$300 million would be used to invest in high-tech businesses starting up or expanding in the state.

Governor Jennifer Granholm, who wanted to ask voters to support the sale of \$2 billion worth of bonds for the high-tech industry to help wean us off our dependence on the automobile, has promised to veto the bill. Heaven forbid we as voters should be allowed some measure of input into the future of our state.

There is a significant need for high-tech workers in our nation. Just under 22 percent of people over 25 have a bachelor degree in Michigan. In Gladwin County that number plummets to 9.2 percent. But for some reason, using this money to respond to the global economy via education for our kids and their kids isn't a priority. Winning the next election is.

In response to the veto threat, the house is sure to bring its dog and pony show to a theater near you to explain how using (what has in part been earmarked as college education money for the state's high school seniors) the tobacco settlement money to fund a tax cut is morally right and fiscally responsible. But it's far easier to do that than cut expenses.

This bizarre theory of cutting taxes without offsetting expenditure reduction has proven to be a recipe for disaster across the county. A glance at the federal budget and its ever expanding girth is indicative of that type of policy.

Then again, why not jump on a soapbox and brag about how you want to cut people's taxes. Because it's easy. It doesn't take any intestinal fortitude compared to rolling up your sleeves and cutting costs.

Oh, wait a minute.

Then they would have to explain to their constituents why services are being cut. Heaven forbid having to defend their actions in the court of public opinion.

Is our tax burden too high? Yes, especially when it comes to property and business taxes. Should they be reduced? Of course. No one wants high taxes.

But the Michigan house and senate should just cut budget expenditures to match the revenues they have to work with. Not find ways to mortgage the educational future of our kids for cents on a dollar so they have some "gem" to run with on their next campaign.

Perhaps they could start by halving their salary and going back to part time. Or better yet, cut their bloated support staff. Because anyone who can come up with a bonehead idea like this obviously has way too much time on their hands and should be part time.

Work with the money you have. Not with the money you want.

# MichWorks names alumni of year

Gladwin County Record

November 1, 2005

GLADWIN COUNTY – Mary Ann Doan has been named the Gladwin County Michigan Works! alumni of the year.

As an unemployed single mother without a high school diploma, Doan was motivated to beat the odds and become more than a statistic.

In a period of three years, Doan was challenged with domestic strife from every direction. Her grandfather passed away, her father went through multiple surgeries, she juggled the responsibilities of motherhood and all illnesses that come along with a normal childhood, along with not having a home to call her own.

Nonetheless, Doan was determined to get ahead. First, she worked toward her GED with the assistance of her Michigan Works! Case Manager/Trainer, Anna Freund. Freund was also instrumental in Doan's acceptance for Certified Nurse Aid (CNA) training at the Altruistic Learning Center in Midland. There, Doan was once again faced with another obstacle. How would she get from her home in Gladwin to her training in Midland without transportation? Doan made arrangements with an acquaintance in Midland to stay at their home during the week to sleep, study and attend classes. She also lined up daycare for her daughter 24 hours per day, five days per week, returning to Gladwin each Friday to spend the weekend with her daughter.

Through all of the family issues, transportation and housing problems, and missing her daughter, Doan maintained a very high grade point average during her training.

Henry Miller, Gladwin County Michigan Works! Business Liaison, was influential in Doan being hired at Gladwin Rehabilitation and Nursing Center on June 1, 2005 under a Work First SPPSE subsidized wage contract. Doan was able to put her education and training into practice and passed the state certification test without any difficulties.

Joe Benac, Doan's supervisor, said that he is very pleased with her. She struggled a little at first and he feels that it was because she recently graduated, the reality of the profession, being overwhelmed with duties, responsibilities, and hesitant about not wanting to do something wrong. Benac took Doan aside and asked her if

she had changed her mind about being in the profession. Doan assured her supervisor that this was what she wanted to do. Benac gave her additional duties and assignments and became her mentor.

"She has progressed very well since that time and I am very pleased to have Mary Ann on my staff," Benac said, noting Doan is a very pleasant person, having the ability to demonstrate compassion to those in her care. She enjoys her job and shows that through her work performance and attention to her job duties. The residents truly enjoy her. Because of Doan's certification and employment, she has been able to get her driver's license training permit, obtain her own residence, and even take care of dental work that she needed to have done. She still plans to complete her GED when her work schedule permits.

"I have come such a long way from where I was a year ago," Doan said.

Michigan Works! supplied many of the tools, but Doan supplied the strength and hard work to reach her goal. When Mary Ann Doan was faced with unemployment, she was determined to seek out success. Gladwin County Michigan Works! proudly recognizes her determination and accomplishments.

Michigan Works is an OEO/Program funded through the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth. Auxiliary Aids and Services available on request to individuals with disabilities. For TDD (or voice) dial 800-649-3777.

# Arraignment ahead in 'brazen' shooting

Tuesday, November 01, 2005

LaNIA COLEMAN  
THE SAGINAW NEWS

Prosecutors on Monday authorized an arrest warrant for an 18-year-old Buena Vista Township youth in a brazen Saturday morning gang shootout that broke up a Halloween party just steps from the Township Police Department.

The warrant charges Qonte L. Works with carrying a concealed weapon, felonious assault and possessing a firearm during a felony.

Works likely will face arraignment today as authorities mull charges against additional 18-year-old suspects -- two from Buena Vista Township and one from Saginaw, who remain jailed, Prosecutor Michael D. Thomas said.

Police, who continue to look for more suspects, have said at least two groups of gunmen opened fire from multiple directions about midnight as nearly 100 teens gathered outside the Maplevue Apartments clubhouse, 1180 Genei.

Thomas said the fact that police were just steps away didn't deter the shooters.

"Apparently, they didn't care," he said. "That's about as brazen an act as you can find. (The apartments are) literally less than 100 yards from the Police Department. (They're) next to a church and behind the Police Department. (The shooters) couldn't miss it."

Three teens suffered injuries in the shootout. Two were treated and released but a 15-year-old girl remained in critical condition Monday with a bullet wound to the chest. The young woman, who is expected to recover, likely was an innocent bystander, police have said.

"There is no doubt some innocent people got hurt, and that's a tragedy," Thomas said. "Whether (the gunmen) were actually aiming at the people who were hit or whether they were spraying the front of the building with bullets and the people were running into a line of fire is something that has yet to be determined."

Thomas said he could not comment on a motive for the shooting, which appears gang-related. He would not comment on whether the shooting is directly linked to the ongoing North Side/South Side gang war.

Thomas said he does not believe the shooting stemmed from a fist fight that witnesses said occurred earlier at the event.

The prosecutor said if the ranks of police continue to dwindle, Saginaw County residents can expect more violence in the same vein as the Saturday morning shootout.

"First of all, there aren't enough Buena Vista police officers," Thomas said. "Second of all, I don't think these people care what they're doing. The citizens of this community are going to have to step up and support and fund law enforcement at an appropriate level. We can't keep cutting police officers and expect them to be everywhere."

"By the same token, and perhaps more importantly, the citizens have to do their duty in cooperating with police in terms of catching these people."

LaNia Coleman covers law enforcement for The Saginaw News. You may reach her at 776-9690.

# Gang activity 'out of control'

Tuesday, November 01, 2005

LaNIA COLEMAN  
THE SAGINAW NEWS

Saginaw's North Side/South Side gang war continues to encroach on neighboring Buena Vista Township, where two early morning drive-by shootings had residents ducking for cover Monday, police say.

"It's out of control," said Township Police Sgt. Sean Waterman. "These kids are out of control." Bullets peppered homes on Bellevue near South 23rd and Yauck near Bertha. The shootings occurred about 15 minutes apart just after 1:30 a.m.

Waterman said the shootings are linked to the Saturday morning shootout at Maplevue Apartments and the escalating hostilities between gang members from the city's North and South sides.

"We're finding that some of the culprits involved in these things are transferring schools from the city to Buena Vista and vice versa," he said. "Some people have moved their children out of Saginaw schools because of the gang problem there, but the problem follows them. Some of them are part of the problem, some aren't."

Several transfer students are affiliated with the North Side gang, which not only clashes with the city's South Side crowd but also does not get along with the township's BV Knights clique, Waterman said.

"The BV Knights have been beefing with the North Side, and (the North Side) has been coming over here and shooting things up," he said.

Gang tensions have produced eight to 10 drive-by shootings in recent weeks, the sergeant said.

"This is ridiculous," he said. "This many shootings in Buena Vista is unusual. It's highly, highly unusual. We don't get this kind of violence in Buena Vista."

Waterman said the escalating violence has police longing for the days of the Gang Task Force.

# A father at wit's end

Sunday, October 30, 2005

Articles by Steven Hepker  
shepker@citpat.com -- 768-4923

Jim Conner sits on the tailgate of his pickup truck, tears flowing as he puffs on a cigarette, and details the lowest point in his struggle to raise three teenagers.

The youngest, Corey, 13, looks down at his stocking feet in the driveway, saying nothing, showing no emotion at the thought of making his father sob again.

Conner had just posted a large sign in the front yard along Cooper Road: "Warning: Lock Your Car and House. My Son is a Thief and a Liar."

The Rives Township man is among a handful of local parents seeking help in dealing with their troubled teenagers. Some, like Conner are pushing for the legal system to be tougher on delinquent juveniles.

Including his son.

When the yard sign went up Aug. 31, Corey Connor already had been suspended from Kidder Middle School for fighting, and was awaiting possible full-year expulsion from the Northwest district school. That hasn't happened yet.

Corey stole school keys and pop machine keys on his way out of the building.

"I was suspended the last three years, over 10 times," he says. "You try to get a rep before high school."

Part of his plan to forge an outlaw reputation is to break into houses and steal drugs, money and whatever he can grab. "Just to say I stole something," he says.

His father said he broke into at least a half-dozen homes in August and was caught several times. Conner begged police and prosecutors to charge the boy.

"The police make reports and tell me I have to come and get him, that there is no room in the youth home," Conner said. "He has to do something violent."

Prosecutors eventually charged him with home invasion and breaking into a vehicle, which is not an automatic trip to the Jackson County Youth Center.

"People would be surprised to learn how hard it is to put someone in juvenile detention,"

Prosecutor Hank Zavislak said. "Even the ones who break into homes."

## **Allows youths leeway**

Society allows youths leeway to turn around. So locking them up is a last resort except in cases of violent behavior or children who are at risk of committing another crime or missing hearings, Probate Judge Susan Vandercook said.

"Overcrowding at the youth center was an issue but it isn't now," she said. "Now, we are looking more at making the best use of services available. We are turning more children away because they are not appropriate to be locked up."

But many parents want misbehaving children locked up because they have no control of them.

"They want the courts to do what they cannot," Vandercook said. "If you lock them up a few days, and the parents do not have control, you haven't solved anything."

## **More of a team effort**

Thanks to multi-jurisdictional planning started this year, there is more of a team effort in making risk assessments of delinquent juveniles, to determine whether there are alternatives to detention, she said.

Those who work with juveniles also are working on a needs-assessment program to point juveniles and their families to services.

Jim Conner finally got what he wanted in late September when Corey was ordered to spend 10 days in the youth home, after skipping school again and sassing Family Court Referee Ivy Arbuckle.

"He just had to lip off to her," Jim Conner said.

While incarceration is still an outside chance for most juvenile delinquents, Jackson County is charging more of them as adults and issuing stern warnings to parents whose children are chronic truants with 20 or more unexcused absences in a term.

"Some of these young criminals just think they can play the system, without consequences," Zavislak said. "If there are no sanctions for their behavior, what message are we sending them?" Juvenile petitions in Jackson County increased from 1,285 in 1990 to 2,107 in 2002, and now average about 1,500 a year, officials said. About a half-dozen probation agents juggle 50 to 100 delinquents at any one time.

While many juvenile offenders do turn around, it is rare that an adult criminal does not have a juvenile record, Zavislak said.

Nothing short of jail or prison can stop some of them from stealing, doing drugs or assaultive behavior. Conner fears his youngest son is in that category, which is why he pushed for "impact."

### **Painted a sign**

At wit's end, Conner and a friend painted the sign to warn neighbors his son cannot be trusted. And to shame the boy -- ironic if Corey truly wants a bad reputation.

The sign proved ineffective, except that a couple of neighbors thanked Conner for the heads-up. "I call it tough love," neighbor Mary Miller said. "It took guts. It kind of shocked the neighborhood."

Miller and her husband guided three children to responsible adulthood by working and playing as a family, involving the kids in sports, band, 4-H, academics and family life, and by knowing their friends, she said.

"My heart goes out to them," Miller said of her neighbors. "I hope they can get him straightened out."

Corey was allowed back to school in early September because he admitted stealing the keys. He lasted three hours.

"He said, 'What do I need to do to get out of here?'" his father said. "He walked out of class and confronted a teacher, then they caught him rummaging through an empty classroom. He missed 14 of his first 16 days of school."

Corey moved back to his mother's house briefly in September, after he was charged with home invasion.

His mother, Michele Jenkins, said she has seen a change for the better since Corey's incarceration.

"It scared the living daylights out of him," she said. "I think he is doing much better."

Conner's mother, Connie Camden, has legal custody of Corey. Corey lives with his father and Conner's former wife, Randi Ebner, and their two younger children at Camden's farm. It is a complicated family dynamic.

### **Roots of the problem**

The roots of what's eating Corey might seem obvious.

His parents divorced when he was a baby; both found other partners. His father became a heroin addict, divorced again and reunited with his second wife after giving up the drug.

Conner lavished his son with material goods and gave him leeway, he admits, as a compensation for living in a broken, unstable home.

"He has motorcycles, guns, video games, all the toys and all the advantages he could want," Conner said.

### **'Never been told no'**

"He has never been told no," stepmother Ebner said.

"Jim's past, and not being there for a long time, kind of gave Corey a big chip on his shoulder," Jenkins said. "But Corey knows right from wrong. We can't make excuses for him."

According to his father, the only times he faced physical discipline were when his grandmother struck him for cursing, and recently when his father swatted him for filthy and disrespectful talk to his grandmother.

In both cases, Corey alerted police and state social workers -- a move that Arbuckle and others say is becoming more common among misbehaving children.

"It's the luck of the draw," Conner said of the police response. He was fortunate to get a cop who advised the boy to go to his room, he said.

Whether Corey's sense of hopelessness is an act or cry for attention is irrelevant: He is putting his life in jeopardy.

What if he breaks into a home and the owner drops him with a shotgun blast?

"When your time is up ! " he responds.

Corey can get good grades. He can be loving to his family and the animals on the family's small farm. He has not shown a violent side, his father and mother said.

"Corey is respectful to me and will do almost anything I ask, but then other people say he is a complete brat," Jenkins said. "He tells me he doesn't know why he broke into homes, and I believe him. I don't think he knows."

"I love him dearly," Conner said.

That love translates into his attending weekly support meetings at a LifeWays program, STAND -- Supportive Techniques and New Directions, where parents of troubled teens gather to vent their frustrations and share tips.

Conner even has shadowed his son in school, sitting next to him in class and meeting with staff.

"My dad would have coffee and doughnuts with the principal," Corey said. "I love my dad, but that is just wrong."

Conner has become a man on a mission. He arranged meetings with state Sen. Mark Schauer, and then with Zavislak, in an effort to enlist support for programs aimed at turning around troubled teens.

Specifically, he wants Jackson County to establish a juvenile drug court, similar to the adult Recovery Court launched by Circuit Judge Charles Nelson in June 2004. Officials say that is a good idea and a possibility down the road.

To show his sincerity, Conner has even begun to volunteer in Recovery Court.

Jackson County agencies in January embarked on jurisdictional planning -- working together to coordinate programs that offer some hope for wayward kids. There are a few through LifeWays, Foote Hospital, Crittendon Home, Woodbridge Behavior Consultants and others.

**Money a problem**

One roadblock is money: Private insurance doesn't cover drug treatment or youth camps, agencies are tapped financially, and most parents can't afford treatment.

Conner, who said he has spent time behind bars, said his best chance at saving his son is to hound him and press officials to hold the boy accountable, even if it means jail.

"I'd rather have him in the system than in a pine box," he said. "Right now those are my only choices."

Battle Creek Enquirer

KALAMAZOO COUNTY

## **\$6.3M grant given to aid troubled youth**

Kalamazoo County will receive a \$6.3 million grant to aid troubled youth, according to the Michigan Department of Community Health.

Kalamazoo Community Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services received the award granted by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. The grant is designed to strengthen local care for youth with serious emotional disturbances, according to the department.

The money will go to Kalamazoo Wraps, a project targeting emotionally troubled individuals 18 years and younger. Its goals include expanding the community's ability to provide mental health services, treatment and support to youth, according to the department.

Originally published October 30, 2005

# Medicare ad blitz confuses many

October 31, 2005

BY KORTNEY STRINGER  
FREE PRESS BUSINESS WRITER

Almost everywhere Maxine Raymond turns, there are ads telling her about the benefits of the new Medicare prescription drug plans that will be available next year.

But as the 79-year-old retired reservations agent for UAL Corp.'s United Airlines contemplates several brochures and mailers she's gotten from insurance companies, she feels like she knows next to nothing about the new plans.

"It's frustrating because I still don't know what's the best plan for me to sign up with," said the Allen Park resident, a diabetic who takes eight medications daily.

In the weeks leading up to the biggest change in the 40-year history of the U.S. health plan that serves people who are disabled or age 65 and older, begins one of the largest health care marketing pushes ever. Private insurers trying to vie for 42 million Medicare enrollees are advertising prescription drug plans in Michigan and across the nation through direct mail, billboards, telemarketing, health fairs and in TV, radio and newspaper ads.

The barrage of marketing, which is likely only to increase between Nov. 15 and May 15, when Medicare recipients can enroll without incurring higher premiums, can be overwhelming for some Medicare recipients, many of whom don't quite understand the new prescription drug benefit let alone the plans themselves.

Indeed, a study by the Kaiser Family Foundation in August -- before the insurers could market their plans to Medicare recipients -- found that 29% of seniors age 65 and older didn't understand the new drug coverage very well.

"I've heard from the beneficiaries and they're getting a lot of information from various sources coming to them and they're getting confused," said Lisa Trumbell, director for the Michigan Medicare/Medicaid Assistance Program, which helps recipients understand the information so they can make informed decisions about what coverage is best for them. "There's a lot of marketing going on."

Beginning Oct. 1, private insurance companies both nationally and regionally were given the green light to market the specifics of their programs -- premiums, deductibles and the like -- directly to Medicare recipients.

While the bulk of the marketing efforts have been devoted to mailings, handing out information at health fairs and telemarketing calls, some insurers are bringing out the big guns.

## BANNED MARKETING TACTICS

Under standards set by the federal government, companies cannot do the following to market drug plans to Medicare beneficiaries:

- Request personal information such as Social Security, bank account or credit card numbers as part of their marketing.

- Visit a consumer at home unless requested by that person.

- Send unsolicited e-mail.

- Call those listed on the national do-not-call registry.

- Call people who've asked that they not call again.

- Call before 8 a.m. or after 9 p.m. or at other times not allowed by state laws.

- Sign someone up by phone if the company made the call. A consumer who wants to enroll in a drug plan must call a company back.

- A company can sign up someone online, but cannot take payments over the Web.

If there's been a violation of these rules, Medicare recipients can call 800-633-4227.

For more information go to:

- Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services said in the next week or so it will have a function in its Web site.

[www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov), enabling Medicare recipients to do a side-by-side comparison of the various plans.

- Michigan Medicare/Medicaid Assistance Program: [www.mymmap.org](http://www.mymmap.org) or 800-803-7174.

- AARP: [www.aarp.org](http://www.aarp.org) or 888-687-2277.

Of the companies that will issue policies nationally, PacifiCare Life & Health Insurance Co. has been using the images of Fred and Ethel from "I Love Lucy" to tout its plan in TV commercials. Meanwhile, United Healthcare Insurance Co. used NBC's "Today" show star Willard Scott and a character called "the Savvy Senior" in a closed-circuit program in movie theaters throughout the country last month.

Last week, Health Alliance Plan began sending mailers out to a portion of the 700,000 Medicare seniors in nine counties in Michigan to market its plans.

The insurer said because it recognizes how much information is being thrown at Medicare recipients in general, it is spending much of its advertising efforts educating people about how the drug benefit will work rather than just pitching its specific plans, although its brochures feature a chart showing the various co-pays and other information about the plans.

"We will do a lot of things just to get people information, in general," said Pat Richards, HAP's chief operating officer. "We really want them to be able to see and compare their options."

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan, for its part, ran ads Sunday in newspapers statewide to advertise its plans, giving Medicare recipients a toll-free number to get details.

The insurance company had run newspaper ads for the last few Sundays featuring an African-American couple with the title "Blue Cross Medicare Plans are on their way," but did not provide details about the plans.

"We're getting tremendous amount of interest from ads we've run," said Helen Stojic, a spokeswoman for the insurer, which also plans to send direct mail to Medicare recipients in the state and is considering TV ads.

In addition to the marketing efforts of private insurers, a number of consumer advocacy groups and government agencies are jumping into the fray, providing information through meetings, personal counseling, Web sites and mailings to help get Medicare recipients up to speed on the options.

Indeed, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, the federal agency that administers Medicare and Medicaid, this month began mailing 98-page handbooks to inform enrollees about the new benefit, how to enroll and whether they should.

In addition, Medicare recipients with employer- or union-sponsored drug coverage likely will receive letters from their plans explaining how the new benefit will affect their coverage.

"It can be very labor intensive" for Medicare recipients to sift through and decipher between all the ads and other information about the Medicare drug plans, said Andy Farmer, associate director for health and supportive services at AARP Michigan, which has 1.5 million members statewide. "There's so much information they have to start wading through."

To help make the information more palatable and to guard against unscrupulous behavior, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services has issued strict guidelines on when and how the companies are allowed to advertise to Medicare recipients.

Among them, companies cannot request personal information such as Social Security and bank account numbers and Medicare must approve the marketing materials from companies with approved prescription drug plans.

With those stipulations in place, experts say the worst thing Medicare recipients can do is ignore the marketing pitches, or worse, throw the information away.

"Hang on to information; don't toss it," said Bob Herskovitz, spokesman for the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. "Before you tear into it, find out what you need, what's important to you ... then, it makes the decision that much more smooth."

Contact KORTNEY STRINGER at 313-223-4479 or [stringer@freepress.com](mailto:stringer@freepress.com).

# Health care headache at county jails

The Grand Rapids Press

Saturday, October 29, 2005

The skyrocketing cost of jail health care has become an open sore for counties nationwide, including Kent -- which spent more than \$4.4 million for inmate care last year. Michigan lawmakers are trying to cauterize the wound with legislation that could get some inmates to pay for their own medical care. It's little more than a Band-Aid for soaring costs, but is worth a try. A bill sponsored by Saginaw County Sen. Michael Goschka, R-Brant, relieves counties of making upfront payments for an inmate's care that might be covered by private insurance or Medicaid. Typical practice now is for counties to pay for the care and then seek reimbursement from an insurer or the government program that covers health costs for low-income families. Mr. Goschka's legislation makes counties the last -- not the first -- stop for payment of inmates' health costs. That seems reasonable. Hospitals and other care providers have systems in place to bill insurers and Medicare and Medicaid. They can do it more efficiently than county officials. The Senate passed the bill last week and sent it to the House. County officials are excited about the bill, but the jury is still out as to whether the change will be financial fruitful. County jails are not likely to be full of inmates with good jobs that provide great health benefits.

A survey of prisoners by intake nurses at the Kent County Jail found that fewer than 30 percent said they had health insurance. Even for those who do, trying to get insurance companies to pay for their medical care could be difficult. An analysis done by the Senate Fiscal Agency didn't find any insurance companies that maintained coverage once a client became incarcerated. Most policies had discontinuation clauses that sever coverage with arrest and detention. It's the same story for inmates eligible for federal Medicare or Medicaid coverage. Most no longer qualify for benefits while incarcerated.

The National Association of Counties is trying to persuade Congress to allow Medicaid- and Medicare-eligible inmates to retain their coverage unless they are convicted. That is reasonable. People jailed and awaiting trial, but not yet convicted of anything, shouldn't lose their benefits. That scenario not only should apply to Medicaid and Medicare recipients, but people covered by private insurance as well. Conviction, not arrest and incarceration, ought to govern loss of health care coverage.

The present set-up and rising health care costs are driving some law enforcement officials to get creative to limit inmate medical expenses. Allegan County officials didn't charge an illegal immigrant for causing a fatal crash in 2000 until the suspect was released from the hospital nearly a year later. Had they arrested and charged the man sooner, the county would have been responsible for his medical bills. Ottawa County officials allowed a woman who had sex with a minor to remain free on bond until after she gave birth, avoiding the expense for her maternity care.

Inmate health care costs rose 42 percent nationwide last year to \$3.7 billion, according to the American Correctional Association. A big reason is the growing number of inmates with mental illnesses and other diseases that require lots of medicines, such as AIDS. Approximately 54 percent of the 31,700 inmates booked into the Kent County Jail last year were on medicines. The Goschka bill is not a remedy for the inmate health care headache, but might provide some relief. With medical costs continuing to escalate, finding a way to defray the expense is vital. But walking away from the responsibility to keep prisoners in good health is not an option. Inmates are serving time in jail, not a leper colony.

Created: 10/29/2005 7:32:10 PM

Updated: 10/30/2005 10:33:28 PM

## **Woman Dies In Domestic Dispute**

Grand Rapids - A 42-year-old Grand Rapids woman died Saturday night after someone stabbed her earlier that afternoon.

Diane Dudley was allegedly stabbed by her boyfriend in the chest Saturday. She died just a few hours later in the hospital.

Dudley's son, 19-year-old Anthony Sherard, was also stabbed in the confrontation at the Wealthy Street house.

Sherard ran across the street to the Wealthy Street Bakery to call for help.

A 43-year-old man who lives at the home was arrested. He faces murder and assault charges.

The suspect is scheduled for arraignment tomorrow. An autopsy on Dudley will also happen tomorrow.

Web Editor: Kathy Reynolds, Grand Rapids Metro Reporter

# Charges filed in attack

Tuesday, November 01, 2005

The Grand Rapids Press

NEWAYGO COUNTY -- A Cedar Springs man accused of trying to kill his ex-girlfriend was arraigned Monday on two charges. Carlos Medina, 34, is charged with assault with intent to commit murder and armed criminal sexual conduct. He allegedly took his ex-girlfriend, a 25-year-old Grant resident, to a wooded area in rural Newaygo County, stabbed her and then buried her alive. He was arrested in Florida and returned to Michigan last month.

# **Man convicted of killing wife dies of apparent suicide**

Tuesday, November 1, 2005

[rhall@kalamazoogazette.com](mailto:rhall@kalamazoogazette.com) 388-7784

Five days after he was sentenced to life in prison for the murder of his estranged wife, Michael Alfred Ridge was found dead at the G. Robert Cotton Correctional Facility in Jackson, authorities said.

The 55-year-old's death appears to be a suicide, said Leo Lalonde, spokesman for the Michigan Department of Corrections. Ridge was found dead about 8 p.m. Saturday, he said.

Lalonde said authorities are awaiting the results of an autopsy but declined to release any details about Ridge's death. He said he did not know when autopsy results would be available.

Ridge had pleaded guilty Sept. 12 to first-degree felony murder and was sentenced on the charge Oct. 24 in Kalamazoo County Circuit Court. Ridge received life in prison without the possibility of parole for killing his wife, 50-year-old Mary Deborah Ridge, on March 27.

According to a police report, Ridge broke into his wife's apartment in Portage and waited for her to arrive home. When she did, Ridge grabbed her, put his hand over her mouth and shot her three times in the head with a short-barreled shotgun.

# Churches must serve as 'healing space' in domestic violence, expert says

Tuesday, November 01, 2005

By Morgan Jarema  
The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- When it comes to domestic violence, some faith leaders turn to their religious texts to convey to men and women that it's better to destroy the body and spare the soul. But the Rev. Marie Fortune argues that when the body is destroyed in domestic violence, so too is the soul. And she says it's up to churches to serve as healing spaces.

"For many people, that's still an assumption, that a house of worship is where you go when you need help," Fortune said. "Faith-based communities can and should be supporting efforts to assist battered women, and professionals who are members of faith communities should be more visible, because you are an extension of the ministry."

Fortune spoke Monday at the Prince Conference Center at Calvin College to some 300 faith leaders, social work professionals and domestic violence workers about the link between domestic violence and faith.

The event, titled "Broken Vows, Battered Faith," was sponsored by Safe Haven Ministries, a local Christian domestic crisis organization that offers a shelter as well as advocacy, counseling, legal and other support to women and children who have left the shelter.

Safe Haven also has a church ministry program -- called Raise Hope -- whose mission is to educate the local faith community on how to recognize and respond to domestic violence.

Fortune is considered an expert in the field of domestic abuse, especially as it relates to issues of faith.

In 1977, she founded the Seattle-based Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence, now known as FaithTrust Institute, where she served as executive director until 1999 and now serves as founder and senior analyst.

Fortune said otherwise well-intentioned faith leaders often put victims of domestic abuse in a position of having to choose between their faith -- which either is against divorce or holds that women submit to their husbands -- and their own safety.

Fortune said churches, synagogues and mosques should preach nonviolence in all relationships, and take a more active role when a member is abused by being a resource for shelter, financial support and calling on its other members' professional knowledge.

Fortune's speech resonated with Lynell Bok, who works in the global community outreach department of Calvary Church in Grand Rapids.

Bok has helped other members through crisis situations, but she has firsthand experience with domestic violence -- she said it took going to two churches before she found a group that was willing to listen and help her through the end of her own abusive marriage.

Tuesday, November 1, 2005

Port Huron Times Herald

## Homeless week asks us for our compassion

Those without shelter need help

Our community's attention to the plight of the homeless officially is supposed to begin Nov. 13 with Homeless Awareness Week. Given the pressing need to help those without shelter, this clearly isn't too early to start.

Homeless Awareness Week will remind us of what we already should know: Homelessness is a growing problem. The resources needed to solve or at least to contain it, are less than adequate.

Safe Horizons, our community's principal advocate for the victims of domestic abuse, also is on the frontlines for the homeless. The agency operates two shelters in Port Huron and has been deluged with people in need of shelter for at least a month.

An emergency shelter, Heritage Hall, is closed because there's no money to open it. Mother Hill's House of Hope, a Port Huron homeless shelter that opened early this year, also faces intense demand. Like

Safe Horizons' shelters, Mother Hill's was forced to put potential clients on a waiting list. The situation is bad, and it's likely to become worse. The winter months normally increase the demand for shelter. With heating costs expected to rise by 50%, the numbers of homeless are likely to grow dramatically as well.

Homeless advocates are sounding the alarm. Homeless Awareness Week will see soup wagons visit several communities.

The hope is the communities' main streets would be lined with about 100 orange ribbons. The decorations and the soup wagons should send a message that homelessness is everyone's business.

There's no reason to wait for Nov. 13. Helping the homeless should begin now.

The leaders of Safe Horizons and Mother Hill's House of Hope would be happy to receive your donations. Send your contributions to Safe Horizons, 1824 Grant Place, Port Huron 48060 or Mother Hill's House of Hope, 900 Stone St., Port Huron 48060.

The absence of shelter is a profound challenge. It is more daunting when entire families cannot count on adequate housing, something many of us take for granted.

Homeless Awareness Week demands our attention and our support. Let's help the homeless in any way we can.

### AT A GLANCE

#### TRAVELING SOUP WAGON

Officials with Safe Horizons are inviting members of the community to take part in a soup-and-bread lunch during Homeless Awareness Week. Dates for each community are as follows. Times and locations still are being decided. For details, call (810) 982-1020.

Nov. 14: Port Huron.

Nov. 15: Yale.

Nov. 16: Algonac.

Nov. 17: Marine City.

Nov. 18: Fort Gratiot and Burtchville townships.

### TO GET INVOLVED

#### ORANGE RIBBON CAMPAIGN

Safe Horizons is looking for people to help make ribbons to decorate local communities during Homeless Awareness Week. A ribbon-making session will be at 11:30 a.m. today in the Pathways shelter, 511 Union St., Port Huron. For details about future activities, call (810) 982-1020.

# Kids stay overnight in boxes for homeless

Gladwin County Record

November 1, 2005

By Jennifer McArdle

GLADWIN COUNTY – Local youth call it cardboard city, but for many, living in cardboard boxes is all too real. Saturday evening, more than a dozen youth got a taste of the reality of homelessness when they spent a full 24 hours without a roof over their heads. The youth, teenagers in seventh through twelfth grades, spent a night in the cold weather of late October with nothing but cardboard boxes as shelter at St. Anne's Catholic Church.

Judy Klimkiewicz, director of religious education at St. Anne's and St. Philip Neri Catholic churches, said the youth from both churches participate in the event each year in honor of Homelessness Awareness Week. The participants also take pledges and donations in an attempt to raise money to combat homelessness.

"It teaches them what the homeless have to go through, what's it's like to live on the street," Klimkiewicz said. "It gives them a compassion for these people."

Last year, the youth raised about \$1,600. They are hoping to surpass that amount this year, and as of Monday they had collected just over \$1,500.

Participants spend a full day as homeless people. The only food they receive is from a soup kitchen, where they are given chicken soup, crackers, and hot cocoa or hot tea. But the kitchen has strict hours. There is also a "shelter" with two beds for the homeless and restrictions on how long they can stay there.

Klimkiewicz said the youth built their own cardboard homes and were allowed to have a sleeping bag. All other possessions were prohibited, including extra blankets, books, snacks and any form of entertainment. They were also encouraged to wear multiple layers of clothing to help stay warm.

"I just realized how hard it is for some people. Later on in the night, you start to realize that this is all you've got. You get very protective of your stuff," said 17-year-old Justin Klimkiewicz, a junior at Gladwin High School.

Lizzy Dewitt, 15, has participated in the event for the past

three years.

"It's kind of like a realization of how bad these people have it," she said.

All participants keep their experiences as a homeless person in perspective with the help of a journal, which they are expected to keep throughout the experience.

Participants also attended all three Masses at the church and spoke about their experiences.

# Good Samaritan Ministries receives award as faith-based model

Tuesday, November 01, 2005

By Shandra Martinez  
The Grand Rapids Press

HOLLAND -- Churches stepping into the realm of providing social services may seem like the latest government-endorsed strategy, but faith-based initiatives are nothing new in Holland. Good Samaritan Ministries' decade-old approach to working with churches and other community organizations to move people from homelessness to home ownership is being held up as a model to the rest of the country.

"These partnerships are not the easiest way to get things done, but it's a better way to do things," praised Amy L. Sherman, senior fellow at the Sagamore Institute for Policy Research and editorial director of the national Faith and Service Technical Education Network (FASTEN).

On Monday morning, Sherman presented Good Samaritan with the 2005 "Partners in Transformation" award at a breakfast ceremony at the AlpenRose restaurant in downtown Holland.

Good Samaritan was selected as the top model in Michigan and one of 10 best examples across the country. Sponsored by FASTEN, a collaborative initiative of the Pew Charitable Trusts and the Points of Light Foundation, the competition aims to identify and promote effective models of faith-based, multisector collaboration. The honor comes with a \$5,000 cash grant.

"They really reflect the spirit of the award," Sherman said of Good Sam.

Partnering with Community Action House, the federal Housing and Urban Development and 16 churches, Good Samaritan's "Community Housing Partnership" served nearly 150 people last year.

Together, they provide an array of services for families, from transitional housing to life skills classes to help with transportation and child care.

The results are impressive, Sherman said.

Eighty percent of the homeless families that graduate from the program move into "decent and affordable" rental housing, and 20 percent have become homeowners.

Selecting the best organizations from nearly 500 applications was difficult for the 14 judges, Sherman said.

Together, the programs nominated serve more than a million people using the energy of 18,000 volunteers and, in many cases, budgets considered "shoestring."

"It was amazing to see the scope and scale of what these organizations are doing," Sherman said.

The Kid's Hope USA program, in Coopersville, was a semifinalist for the award. The program was highlighted for going beyond the Holland-based national program's traditional structure of pairing church members and at-risk children in a one-year, one-hour-a-week mentoring relationship. It also provided after-school tutoring and other activities to the students.

Sherman described herself as a fan of both programs and has written about their success in her books and articles.

"They are able to cast a vision to get people out of the pews and into schools and the community doing great things."

# Group protests Consumers Energy's shutoff, reconnection fee policy

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION  
Saturday, October 29, 2005

By Rhonda S. Sanders  
rsanders@flintjournal.com • 810.766.6374

Vernon Thomas has asthma and uses an electric breathing device to relieve lung congestion. But it's been off since Wednesday, when the power at his Flint home was shut off.

Unemployed and unable to pay an estimated \$1,405 Consumers Energy bill that includes a security deposit and reconnection fee, Thomas joined about 30 protesters Friday who stormed the utility company's main office on E. Court Street demanding relief.

Similarly, Amanda Jenkins, 34, is the mother of nine, including a 15-month-old daughter with severe asthma who needs medication dispensed every morning from an electric respiratory care machine. Jenkins said she and her children have been living with friends since their utilities were shut off a month ago.

Chanting slogans, Thomas and Jenkins joined protesters seeking a meeting with utility officials. Their demands included creating a "fair" shutoff and reconnection fee policy, increasing home heating assistance funds and improving communication about rate changes, said Pam Charles, spokesperson for the local chapter of the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now, which organized the protest.

The protest grew out of a rally ACORN held Wednesday to hear concerns from people experiencing utility payment problems, Charles said. Protesters included those such as Thomas and Jenkins whose utilities have been shut off or are pending shutoff because of late payments and penalty fees.

Speaking for the group, Charles addressed Kevin Keane, area manager for Consumers, who met briefly with the protesters in a foyer outside locked doors leading to Consumer offices.

Charles gave Keane a list of demands and names of several people who he said need emergency power restoration. She also asked Keane to arrange a meeting with company officials to hear ACORN's concerns. Keane said he would convey the group's demands to the company's Jackson headquarters but did not expect a response until early next week.

The crowd dispersed soon after police officers arrived and ordered them to move from Consumers property to the sidewalk.

Charles said several protesters left in tears because they had been promised a meeting with officials to negotiate getting their utilities turned back on.

## QUICK TAKE

Help line  
Consumers Energy customers can go online to [www.consumersenergy.com/welcome.htm](http://www.consumersenergy.com/welcome.htm) to seek help with payment arrangements. An automated telephone service can be reached at (800) 477-5050.  
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"We want to protect the vulnerable residents from losing heat this winter," said Charles, 51. She said she lives on a fixed income and was caught off guard by notice of nearly a \$100 increase in her heating bill this winter. Others in the group have due bills ranging from \$1,600 to \$4,000 because of penalties they said they cannot reasonably pay and still meet other expenses, she said. "Where can people find that kind of money? Charles asked. "Most are senior citizens and low- to moderate-income families."

Gov. Jennifer Granholm announced Friday that she has signed emergency rules to protect low-income utility consumers. The rules include:

A longer period between utility bill mailing and due dates.

No service shutoffs or late payment fees for failure to pay an estimated bill by the due date.

No service shutoff to senior citizens and others on fixed incomes.

# **Time is now to prepare for winter heating bills Do-it-yourself remedies can cut fuel costs**

Ann Arbor News Editorial

Tuesday, November 1, 2005

About the last thing you need after having to contend with paying close to \$3 a gallon for a tank of gas is rising costs to heat your home this winter.

But that exactly what you're facing: Tight energy markets are expected to cause heating bills to soar as much as 50 percent over last winter's.

You can pay those kinds of bills by doing pretty much what your did last year: Keep the thermostat where you set it then, and perhaps do little to winterize your home.

Or you can possibly take advantage of some government programs designed to assist qualified residents or, to make an even greater impact, try several do-it-yourself remedies that can substantially lower your bills.

Government remedies appear to be few. New Public Service Commission regulations call for consumers getting 22 days from the date winter residential utility bills are sent to them to pay them. That's up from 17 days.

If you're over the age of 65, regardless of income, or your household income is up to double the poverty rate (\$38,700 for a family of four), you'll likely be able to avoid service shutoffs with new regulations requiring monthly payment of just 6 percent of your estimated annual bill. That's 1 percent less than the former PSC-set rate.

Deposits required of any new customers under new PSC rules also would not be allowed to exceed an average monthly bill for the residence.

Hopefully the PSC also will act on a reform sought by Attorney General Mike Cox: requiring that gas price increases get spread over 12 months, beginning in April.

Consumers can look to take advantage of government incentive programs by logging on to the Database of State Incentives for Renewable Energy at [dsireusa.org](http://dsireusa.org), which is maintained by the North Carolina Solar Center and funded by the U.S. Department of Energy. Solar energy and other alternative energy resources may ease energy bills. The payback on investments can take years, however.

But much that can be done to lower your home energy bills can be accomplished without government's assistance and at little to no cost. Perhaps the most obvious is lowering the thermostat. But perhaps not so obvious is just how much you can save by turning it down, even by a little. Lower it just one degree, and experts say you'll likely save as much as 3 percent on your bill.

The Ann Arbor Public Schools are dropping thermostats during school days this winter from 68-to-72 degrees to 66-to-70 degrees - the first time the district has lowered them in 20 years. Doing so is expected to save the district, which last year spent \$1.6 million on heating bills, as much as \$100,000.

Installing a programmable thermostat for as little as \$20 can save you still more money. It alters your home's temperature several times a day, when you're not around to do so or when you otherwise might forget.

Reducing drafts in your home can save you perhaps 10 percent on your heating bill. A caulking gun will set you back just \$5, and caulk just \$5 a tube.

You also may want to look at insulating the attic and pipes. Consider having your furnace serviced and clean the filters once a month. Setting your water heater thermostat at 120 degrees, installing double-pane windows and using compact fluorescent light bulbs also will save money. Don't wait till winter, though. With temperatures already dipping into the 30s at night, the time to start saving is now.

## **Sexual assaults dot man's past**

Tuesday, November 01, 2005

By Scott Hagen  
shagen@citpat.com -- 768-4929

A man accused of kidnapping, beating and raping a 14-year-old Jackson County girl has a history of sexual assault.

Mark Urban, a 26-year-old Hillsdale man originally from Jackson, was arrested last week following a night of alleged sexual and physical assaults on the girl, police said.

Urban knew the girl and was friends with the victim's older brother, Hillsdale County Prosecutor Neal Brady said.

The girl apparently sneaked out of her house in southern Jackson County after midnight Wednesday to go for a ride with Urban, police and prosecutors said. At some point, she became uncomfortable and asked to go home. Urban refused and grew angry, police said.

Through the night and at different locations near Hillsdale, including abandoned houses and state game areas, Urban repeatedly beat the girl, raped her multiple times and left her for dead, bound and gagged, covered in weeds and leaves, police said.

The girl escaped from her constraints and found a nearby house. After she described her attacker, police arrested Urban shortly after.

He was arraigned Friday in Hillsdale County District Court on four felony charges, including two counts of first-degree criminal sexual conduct, a count of kidnapping with the intent to commit sexual assault and a count of assault with intent to murder.

Each charge carries a maximum sentence of life in prison.

"Anyone who's charged with any of these four (felonies) is a depraved person," Brady said.

Roderick Dunham, Urban's defense attorney, did not immediately return calls seeking comment.

Urban spent almost three years in prison for breaking and entering into a vehicle and was released in February 2004, state corrections records show.

On the morning of the alleged crimes, Urban was scheduled to appear in Jackson County Circuit Court to be sentenced after he pleaded guilty to assault with intent to commit criminal sexual conduct stemming from an arrest earlier this year. The maximum

sentence is 10 years.

In 1995, when he was 16, Urban spent a year in juvenile detention in Elkhart, Ind., for a sexual assault charge, said Mark Blumer, chief assistant prosecutor in Jackson County.

Urban is scheduled for a preliminary examination in Hillsdale County on Nov. 9 for the four felony charges related to last week's assault.

He is scheduled to face sentencing in Jackson County Circuit Court the next day. Prosecutors plan to bring Urban back to Jackson County for sentencing and then ship him back to Hillsdale for a possible trial.

In most Michigan cases, charges in different jurisdictions would carry concurrent sentences, served at the same time. Because Urban was out on bond awaiting sentencing when the crimes he is charged with were committed, Urban could face consecutive sentences from Jackson and Hillsdale counties.

# Sketches Released Of Center Line Flasher

## *Man Exposes Self To Students Near Schools*

POSTED: 5:40 pm EST October 31, 2005

CENTER LINE, Mich. -- Authorities are warning trick-or-treaters in Center Line to stay in groups on Halloween night as a suspected flasher remains on the loose, Local 4 reported. Police released two sketches of the man -- based on descriptions from his victims -- accused of exposing himself three times in two days last week.

Center Line public school officials said the man got out of a Jeep Grand Cherokee at about 8:15 a.m. last Thursday near a 9-year-old girl who was walking to Peck Elementary School .

The man either had his pants down when he exited the vehicle, or pulled them down in front of the girl, according to school officials.

Officials from the city's department of public safety said on Wednesday, three girls -- ages 7, 9 and 11 -- who attend Miller Elementary were about two blocks from the school when a man driving a black, four-door, newer-model Jeep Grand Cherokee with tinted windows pulled up next to them.

Authorities said the man opened a door on the vehicle and was wearing only a T-shirt and socks. The girls screamed and ran in the opposite direction toward their homes, according to Local 4 reports.

The man was described as white, 20 to 30 years old, with a slim build, and short brown hair spiked on top, according to public safety officials.

Center Line and Warren police have increased patrols near schools in the area and have advised children to travel in groups, stay close to their homes and not to approach any unfamiliar people or cars.

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# **Girl Will Be Returned to Parents Who Barred a Cancer Treatment**

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Published: November 1, 2005

CORPUS CHRISTI, Tex., Oct. 31 (AP) - A 13-year-old cancer patient who was put into foster care after her parents refused to allow radiation treatment will be reunited with her family, a judge ruled Monday.

Faced with the deteriorating health of the patient, Katie Wernecke, the judge, Jack Hunter of State District Court, said she would be better off with her family in Agua Dulce, near Corpus Christi, than in the custody of the foster parents she had been assigned by the state's Child Protective Services agency.

He said that all sides were well intentioned, but that the stops, starts and delays in Katie's treatment, as adults battled, were doing more harm than good.

"C.P.S. and the Werneckes are never, ever going to agree," Judge Hunter said.

Child Protective Services removed Katie from her family's home in June after her parents stopped her treatment for Hodgkin's disease, a form of cancer. Her father, Edward Wernecke, said he worried that radiation treatment could put his daughter at a heightened risk for breast cancer, stunt her growth and cause learning problems.

Judge Hunter said Katie would be allowed home after she completed a round of chemotherapy in Houston, but he did not say when that would be.

A Child Protective Services spokesman, Aaron Reed, said the agency hoped the Werneckes would continue treatment. "This isn't the outcome we advocated for," he said, "but our goal all along has been for Katie to get the treatment she needs and get better and go home."

Katie's parents said they were overjoyed with the judge's decision. "The good news is we're getting Katie back," Mr. Wernecke said.

At Monday's hearing, Mr. Wernecke said he wanted to try other treatments for Katie before considering radiation as a last resort.

Katie's oncologist has said her chances of surviving have fallen to about 20 percent from 80 percent because of incomplete treatment.

# 3 New Studies Assess Effects of Child Care

By TAMAR LEWIN  
The New York Times

Published: November 1, 2005

For most working parents, no other issue is so fraught with worry as the choice of child care. In a field long plagued by overheated headlines and complicated political overtones, three new studies offer some solid information on the pros and cons of different arrangements.

Two bolster research that found that long hours in group child care are linked to better reading and math skills but worse social skills and more behavioral problems. The third suggests that children in child care centers are safer than those who receive care in private homes, whether in a neighbor's home or by a nanny in the child's own home.

Four years ago, the nation's most ambitious and longest-running child care study sparked a firestorm with its findings that 4½-year-olds who had spent more than 30 hours a week in child care were more demanding, more aggressive and more noncompliant than others, regardless of the type or quality of care, the family's socioeconomic status or the sensitivity of the mother's parenting.

Now a new report from that research - the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development's Study of Early Child Care - has tracked the same children through early elementary school and found that by third grade, those who had spent long hours in child care continued to score higher in math and reading skills and that their higher likelihood of aggressive behavior had dissipated. But it also found that they still had poorer work habits and social skills. Researchers cautioned that the findings should not be a cause of alarm, since the effects of child care were found to be small.

"It isn't that these kids are more likely to have clinical levels of behavior problems," said Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, a professor of child development at Columbia University. "You're getting a slight uptick, but it's still in the normal range."

Generally, the effects of child care were much smaller than the effects of good or bad parenting. "Virtually across the board, the effects of parenting are greater than the effects of child care, so some people might say we don't need to worry about the small effects of child care," said Cathryn Booth-LaForce of the University of Washington, a researcher on the study.

"But child care affects so many children that for society at large, even small effects are important," Professor Booth-LaForce added. "We have to consider whether we're creating a generation of children who have slightly less self-control, slightly more behavior problems, and whether teachers will have to spend a little more time on classroom management and a little less on instruction."

A separate study, being released today and based on a nationally representative sample of more than 14,000 kindergartners, found that while center-based day care programs modestly benefited middle-class children in early language and mathematics learning, youngsters from poor families experienced double those gains.

"Compared to many homes, preschool centers are richer settings in terms of enriched language, reading and math," said Bruce Fuller, a co-author of this report, "The Influence of Preschool Centers on Children's Development Nationwide: How Much Is Too Much?"

The report, by sociologists at Stanford and the University of California, found that cognitive skills in prereading and math were strongest when children entered a center-based program from age 2 to 3.

But it also found that on average, the earlier a child enters center-based care, the slower the pace of social development. The greatest effect was among high-income children. Youngsters who were from families with income of at least \$66,000 and who spent more than 30 hours a week in center-based care had the weakest social skills - including diminished levels of cooperation, sharing and motivated engagement in classroom tasks, along with greater aggression - compared with similar children who remained at home with a parent.

Another study, being published today in The American Sociological Review, is apparently the first broad research into safety in child care. It found that the rate of death among children receiving care in private homes was 16 times that of children in child care centers.

"Fatalities are the tip of the iceberg, and they're fortunately very rare, but they do reveal something about what goes on in centers," said Julia Wrigley, a sociologist and acting associate provost at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, who wrote the report with Joanna Dreby. "No one kind of child care is clearly and definitely better for all children, but in terms of safety there are advantages in centers."

Infants are by far the most vulnerable children in care, Professor Wrigley found, and most often die from being shaken, usually by a caregiver stressed by constant crying. In a database she put together from state records, legal cases and news reports covering 1989 to 2003, she found 203 shaken-baby deaths in care in a private home and not a single one in a child care center.

It was a shaken-baby death that prompted her project.

"I was on the Phil Donahue show talking about a book I'd written on the relationship between parents and the caregivers they hire in their home, and another woman on at the same time had a baby who was shaken to death by the nanny," Professor Wrigley said. "As a sociologist, that got me thinking that with eight million kids in paid child care every day, there must be some safety data out there somewhere. But there wasn't."

Professor Wrigley found that the risks of injury and sexual abuse were both highest in family day care - a usually informal arrangement in which several children receive care together in a private home - while child care centers had the highest rate of near-miss incidents, as when a child wandered off onto a highway, for instance, or was left in a van.

Some child care experts said the latest research should help define the next generation of studies.

"We really need to begin to look more carefully at what is going on among the children in child care," said Deborah A. Phillips, a professor of psychology at Georgetown University. "It may be that we're not doing a good job of training teachers on peer relationships, on how you foster cooperation and empathy."

Most of all, Professor Phillips said, negative findings on child care should serve as a call to action.

"Child care is the fraught issue for parents," she said. "But I think the story here is when we are going to stop wringing our hands and start assuring better child care choices for parents."

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**IN A MIN****THE LAW****Bill seeks change  
in adoptions by  
unmarried couples**

State Rep. Paul Condino, D-Southfield, is expected to announce a bill this morning at the Southfield Public Library that would give parental rights to both partners when unmarried couples adopt children.

The bill would amend the state probate law to allow two unmarried people to adopt a child together. Currently, unmarried people can legally adopt, but their partners do not have parental rights.

"We have a coalition of supporters for this, including the American Bar Association, the American Pediatric Association, the American Medical Association and numerous religious groups," Condino said Monday.

Similar efforts in Lansing have failed in recent years, and opposition to Condino's bill could be stiff in the Republican-dominated Legislature.

Condino said the bill's passage is urgently needed because about 4,500 children await adoption in the Michigan Department of Human Services' foster care system.

*By Bill Laitner*

# Woman considers adopting sister's foster son

**Dear Abby:** My older sister, "Katie," has three children — an adopted son, a foster son and a biological son — all under the age of 3. Katie and her husband took in their foster son, "Richie," only because he's the biological brother of their adopted son. They didn't know if they'd get to keep Richie or not, so Katie closed herself off to him emotionally. During the year and a half that she has had Richie, he has become, in essence, an "invisible" child. She shows him no kindness, no positive attention and certainly no love.

I love Richie. It makes my heart ache to see him emotionally neglected. My husband and I have been unable to have children of our own, and we currently keep Richie every weekend. We have considered tak-



**DEAR ABBY**  
Jeane Phillips

ing him in ourselves, and if possible, adopting him. How do we do this without creating a rift in the family?

— *Distressed in Wisconsin*

**Dear Distressed:** Whether she wants to admit it or not, your sister must be aware on some level that she's unable to love Richie as she does the other boys. I recommend that you take it slowly. The first thing that you, your husband and

the extended family could do would be to "sympathize" with Katie about how hectic her life must be. Suggest that you'd be happy to "lighten her load" by taking Richie more often. Once you have established that routine, begin mentioning how hard it is for you and your husband to see him go home. After that, the next logical step would be to offer to adopt the boy — which might provide your sister with the "out" she needs. If she's open to it — and let's pray that she is — you won't have to inform child protective services. If she's not, I hope you will step in on his behalf anyway.

Write Dear Abby at [www.DearAbby.com](http://www.DearAbby.com) or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, CA 90069.

# Church volunteers feed a need with meals for the hungry

Monday, October 31, 2005

By Charles Honey  
Grand Rapids Press Religion Editor

GRAND RAPIDS -- As a man approached with a jug of orange juice, Joe Green held out a plastic cup and asked, "Sir, may I have some more of that juice please? I have the flu." Ed Miller obliged, filling Green's cup and many others at Heartside Park. The modest patch of green south of downtown became an oasis of kindness Sunday as scores of people such as Green lined up to be served free breakfast.

"I think it's awesome what the people are doing here," said Green, 42, who spent the night sleeping outside St. Andrew's Cathedral. "It's heaven-sent."

The 21 church volunteers served more than 275 meals, the most since they began their ham-and-eggs ministry in August.

Martin Kinchen sipped his juice as a stiff breeze chilled the sunny park on Ionia Avenue SW. He marveled at the mostly Lakeshore area volunteers who serve weekly breakfast to the homeless and hungry.

"It is impressive in today's society, because a lot of people don't care," said Kinchen, 53, as cars roared by on nearby U.S. 131. "It's what the church is supposed to do, is outreach to people." That's why Ed and Lois Miller of Holland showed up at 9:30 a.m. to join the small army of grills and goodwill.

"It's being church," said Lois, 55, who brought boxes of blankets and jackets. "Church isn't a place, and it shouldn't just be allocated its little time slot. If you're going to call yourself a Christian, you have to do it 24/7."

Scrambling eggs on one of three grills and a pig-roaster, organizer Rick Kasten directed people to go buy more food. In two hours they ran through 75 dozen eggs, 200 bananas, nearly 30 loaves of bread and 25 gallons of orange juice.

"I feel that when we're down here cooking and mingling, we're square in the middle of the will of God," said Kasten, 43, as his wife, Kathy, and daughters Leslie and Joanie served up platefuls. Kasten started the meals after helping his son, Nic, and other young adults serve hot dogs in the park on Wednesday evenings. With his former church folded, Kasten figured serving Sunday breakfast would beat church-shopping.

So he called a few friends and "just decided to show up one day with a grill." About 100 hungry Heartside residents showed up, too.

"It was overwhelming," said Kasten, a burley man wearing a sweatshirt from his company, Lakeshore Glass and Metals. "The need was huge."

The Heartside Park meals are similar to retired Grand Rapids lawyer Jim Flickinger's "Hot Dog Tuesdays" at Veterans Memorial Park.

For nine years, Flickinger has served lunch to the hungry and the homeless -- meals that earlier this year drew the attention of the Kent County Health Department.

Questions about insurance, licensing and food safety were resolved through talks with health officials. And the weekly impromptu picnics did not need a permit because the volunteer effort qualified for an exemption as a nonprofit group.

Although many Heartside ministries serve meals, Kasten had stumbled onto a Sunday-morning void. Before long, the breakfast guests doubled. He's now looking for an indoor venue for the winter.

Food is not the main offering, Kasten says.

"Just go out and talk to people," he told the volunteers Sunday. "Build relationships. That's ultimately the goal."

Theresa Gargala of Zeeland did just that, chatting with Peaches Williams about her family.

Smiling in the broad sunshine, Gargala said worship is great, but "this feels more like what Jesus would do."

# Don't give these kids any candy

By Christy Strawser

Daily Tribune Staff Writer

PUBLISHED: October 30, 2005

*HUNTINGTON WOODS — Trick or treating will take on a new dimension for about 30 local students who plan to go door-to-door on Halloween to collect cans of food for the hungry.*

Emma Fialka-Feldman, president of the Interact Club at Berkley High School, said a group of teens will meet at her house for pizza Monday evening, then will head out on behalf of Feed the Children.

The kids walked around their neighborhood beforehand and handed out fliers asking people to stock up canned goods.

"This year at the camp they talked about this project and I decided to take the initiative to do it in my community," said Fialka-Feldman, who has attended leadership camp for four years.

The teen said she hopes that the event gives adults a better sense of teens.

"As teens, society continues to look down on us, saying we're up to no good," Fialka-Feldman said. "Involving 30 students to ... be proactive on Halloween gives a good image to the public, especially adults."

Fialka-Feldman said that she hopes the event will "open their eyes to a world outside of their iPod and friends.

"Students are learning that community service is fun and that is something that is important to me," Fialka-Feldman said. "I want kids to know that they can make the world a better place and enjoy doing it."

Contact Christy Strawser at [christy.strawser@dailytribune.com](mailto:christy.strawser@dailytribune.com) or at 248-591-2569.

# State to begin beaming child support payments

Tuesday, November 01, 2005

By Federico Martinez  
MUSKEGON CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

Thousands of Muskegon County residents will begin receiving their child support payments electronically, rather than by paper check, beginning today.

The new process distributes payments via debit cards or automatic transfers to personal checking or savings accounts, rather than the old way of mailing checks to recipients, said Gary Tornnga, a program manager for Muskegon County's Department of Human Services.

State officials say sending child support payments electronically will allow recipients to receive the funds more quickly and eliminate the opportunity for paper checks to be lost or stolen in the mail, Tornnga said. The new process is also expected to be easier and less expensive for the state. Child support payees already have the option of making payments electronically, but previously those payments were distributed to the recipients by paper check.

"I think it will be a good thing," Tornnga said. "If people move it's not going to matter because it will go into a debit card or personal bank account. It should all happen a lot faster."

Child support recipients in Muskegon, Shiawassee and Marquette counties were given until Oct. 14 to choose whether they wanted to receive a debit card or have their payments direct deposited. The prepaid debit cards, which are officially called the "ReliaCard Visa," are not credit cards. They will be accepted at any store or business that accepts debit cards. Cardholders can also receive "cash back" free of charge from any bank or credit union teller that processes Visa cash advances at their teller window.

The entire state is expected to start converting to the new system by January 2006.

All child support recipients in Muskegon, Shiawassee and Marquette are participating in the new system, but there are exceptions who still will be able to receive checks. Among those are people with a mental or physical disability, or language or literacy barrier, that results in hardship for those individuals in accessing electronic payments.

Other exceptions include individuals who receive two or fewer payments per year, or if payments are not expected to continue in a 12-month period. Also excepted are individuals with both home and work addresses that are more than 30 miles from an automated teller machine or their financial institution.

Electronic payment transfers are being handled in Lansing, not by local Department of Human Services offices, Tornnga said.

Human Services is overseeing the implementation of the new electronic system because the agency works very closely with Michigan's Friend of the Court, which decides who receives child support and the amount they receive, Tornga said.

Human Services clients so far seem to like the idea of having a debit card because it reduces the stigma of having to cash a child support check, Tornga said. He compares the process as similar to welfare recipients who now use electronic benefit transfer cards instead of food stamps.

But there are some things to be careful of when using the new cards, Tornga said.

Although the cards are prepaid, under some circumstances -- such as pay-at-the-pump gas dispensers or restaurants in which a tip is added to the bill -- the card can become overdrawn. In those cases, the cardholder will be subject to an over-limit fee of \$20.

Cardholders who withdraw money from an automated teller machine will also be assessed a service charge of \$1.50.

November 1, 2005

## **UC man found on Saturday in cemetery near Veteran Affairs Center**

By Amanda VanAuker/Assistant Editor  
Coldwater Daily Reporter

BATTLE CREEK — A Union City man who had been missing since Tuesday, Oct. 25, was found on Saturday, Oct. 29 in a cemetery across the street from where he disappeared.

On Oct. 25 at around 9 a.m., George W. Halferty, 54, walked away from the Veteran Affairs Medical Center in Battle Creek, where he had been a patient. According to Halferty's mother, Mildred Rigg, when she and Halferty's wife, Bonnie, arrived at the medical center for a conference, Halferty had already disappeared.

Rigg said that Halferty had suffered from a "mental breakdown," and was supposed to be "locked in" at the center. No one knew exactly how he left, but according to the Battle Creek Enquirer, a spokesman for the hospital said that "Halferty apparently left on his own initiative."

# Salvation Army prepares for holidays

*Kathie Marchlewski,  
Midland Daily News  
11/01/2005*

This is the final article in a series highlighting local non-profit agencies served by United Way. The United Way 2005 campaign ends Thursday. For more information about how to give, call 631-3670.

As the annual United Way campaign moves through its final week, Thanksgiving is on its way and Christmas is coming. Midland County's Salvation Army building at 330 Waldo Avenue is bustling with activity as it prepares for the holiday season.

There are coats and toys to collect, bell-ringers to recruit and turkeys to be cooked. Beginning today, the Army will be registering families who will need holiday help and scrambling to gather the goods they will need.

"We have a lot of things happening," said Major Patrick McPherson.

The Army expects that it will serve more than 3,000 people in the upcoming months -- last year it reached 886 families, including 1,552 children. Year after year, the numbers are increasing.

To meet the increasing needs, The Salvation Army hopes to raise \$90,619 in its red kettles this year. Last year, it raised \$87,000. It also is hoping for nearly \$190,000 in its mail campaign.

McPherson expects that meeting the new goals, which will be necessary in providing year-round services to the community, will be no easy task.

"This year the challenges are more dramatic in terms of the economy," he said.

Along with hoping people will contribute, he also needs people to collect. McPherson still is looking for bell-ringing volunteers, and for store owners who will volunteer their entranceways.

"That's what makes it work," he said.

The time slots and entrances that aren't filled by volunteers -- the Army has ringers all around town for 11 hours a day from Nov. 18 until Christmas Eve -- will be filled by employees McPherson is still hiring.

"The people we employ don't have a job. That's a service in itself. It helps them have a better Christmas than they would otherwise," McPherson said.

Bell ringing begins on Nov. 18. The Army still is collecting coats to distribute this year and will begin collecting Toys for Tots Monday.

For more information on giving, or to receive, call 496-2787.

#### Dates to remember

Today through Thursday: Christmas registration for assistance with toys, food, coats, shoes and the Adopt-A-Family program. 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Tuesday and Wednesday and 8:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. Thursday.

Families also will pick up winter gear at this time.

Coats, hats and mittens, especially infant sizes and adult extra large, are still needed. Contributions can be made at the Salvation Army, 330 Waldo Ave.

Nov. 7 to Dec. 22 -- Toys for Tots Kick-off. Place new, unwrapped toys at drop-off boxes throughout Midland County.

Nov. 15 and 29, Dec. 6 and 20 -- Late registration for Christmas programs.

Nov. 18 to Dec. 24 -- Red Kettle bell ringing. Salvation Army is recruiting volunteers, paid employees and businesses willing to lend their entranceways. Call 496-2787.

Nov. 23 -- Thanksgiving dinner at the Salvation Army. Everyone is invited. 5 to 7 p.m.

Dec. 14 and 15 -- Toys for Tots and food distribution at the Salvation Army 8:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m.

# City to consider living wage Issue remains hotly debated

Chris Springsteen

*The Enquirer*

Some people soon may benefit from a Battle Creek city-mandated minimum wage, or "living wage." City commissioners are expected Tuesday to consider an ordinance that would set \$10.19 as the minimum wage for certain companies working with the city.

If it is approved, it likely would take effect May 1. The issue has been hotly debated since being introduced by Commissioner Ryan Hersha about two weeks ago.

Those in favor say it will ensure city dollars are being spent to create well-paying jobs that have a positive impact on employees' quality of life.

Opponents caution that a living wage will reduce the number of jobs in town and hurt economic development activities.

Commissioner Nancy Macfarlane said she has not decided where she stands and wants more time to consider the implications.

"I have tremendous reservation about pushing something like this, however much of a value it might seem, without fair and

adequate research time for the commission," she said.

"For us to research something as important as this in two weeks' time during campaign season is a little overwhelming."

Companies and organizations that would be compelled to pay the living wage include those that receive, in any 12-month period, more than \$50,000 in contracts or \$10,000 in grants, including tax abatements and federal Community Development Block Grant funds.

Nonprofits with fewer than 10 employees and for-profit companies with fewer than five employees would be exempt from the ordinance.

Nonprofits that can prove in a public hearing that paying the living wage would cause more harm to the organization than good to its employees also would get an exemption.

Additionally, any company covered by the city's current prevailing-wage ordinance and seasonal workers would be exempt.

Prevailing wage requires contractors doing construction projects funded with public money to pay a wage equal to levels common to where the project is being completed.

Living wage laws, however, generally are based on economic indicators, including the poverty line,

and are broader than prevailing wage.

About a dozen city, county or township governments in Michigan have living wage laws, including Ann Arbor, Detroit, Ypsilanti and Lansing.

Hersha said he has taken a political beating from some people since the ordinance was introduced, but feels the current commission must take the responsibility to act on it.

"I think it's simply inaccurate to say we don't have enough information to make a decision," Hersha said. "At least 130 other cities in the nation have passed this. The people who are most adamantly calling for study are the ones opposed to it."

*Chris Springsteen covers Battle Creek City Hall and Emmett Township. He can be reached at 966-0676 or at [csprings@battlecr.gannett.com](mailto:csprings@battlecr.gannett.com).*

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[ From the Lansing State Journal ]

## **Appeals court halts ruling authorizing same-sex benefits**

By David Eggert  
Associated Press

The Michigan Court of Appeals on Monday halted a ruling that allows governments and public universities to provide health insurance to the partners of gay workers.

The appeals court granted Republican Attorney General Mike Cox's request to delay a lower court's decision until the higher court decides the issue. The court also sped up the timetable for hearing the appeal.

Ingham County Circuit Judge Joyce Draganchuk ruled last month that public-sector employers can offer domestic partner benefits without violating a gay marriage ban approved by Michigan voters nearly a year ago.

### **Advertisement**

Cox and conservative groups think the constitutional amendment prohibits public employers from providing same-sex benefits in future contracts.

"We will continue to follow our obligation to defend the will of Michigan voters," Cox spokeswoman Melissia Christianson said Monday.

The amendment made the union between a man and a woman the only agreement recognized as a marriage "or similar union for any purpose." Those six words have spurred a fight over benefits for gay couples, who argue voters never intended to keep them from receiving health insurance .

Health benefits were included in labor contracts negotiated with state employees. Democratic Gov. Jennifer Granholm put the benefits on hold while waiting for a court ruling but now is asking the state Civil Service Commission to approve them.

According to a recent poll by Lansing-based EPIC/MRA, 47 percent of Michigan voters support the court ruling that allows same-sex benefits, while 39 percent oppose it and 14 percent are undecided.

The poll had a margin of error of plus or minus 4 percentage points.

October 31, 2005

## **DOMESTIC PARTNER BENEFITS** **STAYED**

The Court of Appeals ordered Monday that governmental units not already offering domestic partner benefits hold off a little longer before making that offer.

The court, Chief Judge William Whitbeck and Judges Donald Owens and Bill Schuette, stayed the order of Ingham Circuit Judge Joyce Draganchuk that benefits for unmarried couples, including same-sex partners, were not prohibited under a new constitutional provision prohibiting same-sex marriages.

The court also ordered (*National Pride at Work v. Governor of Michigan*, COA docket No. 265870) expedited hearings, with the state's brief due in 21 days and the plaintiff having 14 days to respond.

As did the circuit court ruling, the Court of Appeals' action has split state officials.

"We are pleased with the court's ruling," said Attorney General Mike Cox, who is representing the state in the case, in a statement. "We will continue to follow our obligation to defend the will of Michigan voters."

"We are disappointed that the Court of Appeals has issued a stay, but we are at least encouraged that they have agreed to hear the case on an expedited basis," said Liz Boyd, press secretary for Governor Jennifer Granholm, who has supported offering the benefits and has joined with the plaintiffs in the case. The administration had planned to take a domestic partner benefits plan negotiated with state worker unions to the December 13 Civil Service Commission under Ms. Draganchuk's order.